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TIME FOR WHAT?

by Howard H. Brinton

We know from experience that representative government can succeed only when enough individuals, engaged in the ordinary routine job of making a living, allocate enough of their time to make it succeed. As the name suggests, "representative" government necessarily reflects the attention given to it by those who are represented. Our American pattern of life is in serious danger today because too many Americans are too busy to take their proper part in the democratic process. But what, in this age of time-saving devices, do we really mean when we say that we are "too busy", and what can we do about it?

Some light on this fundamental problem may be thrown by an examination of a small group, the Society of Friends, which has exerted an influence out of all proportion to its numbers. The Quaker form of church government is the most complete democracy ever devised. Not only do the Quakers refuse to admit the imposed authority of any individual. They do not even admit the authority of a majority. All decisions must be made on the basis of unanimity, reached by a process that considers the opinion of every person, both expert and inexpert. Therefore a Quaker committee sometimes appears to be amateurish and time-consuming.

The Quakers are aware of the price which must be paid for their peculiar democracy, though they would be the first to admit that they have not always been willing to pay that price. They have a unique device, called "The Queries", for checking up on themselves. These queries are a series of questions asked and answered each year by each Meeting. This forms a kind of group confessional.

One Query asks: "Are you careful to keep your business and your outward activities from absorbing time and energy that should be given to spiritual growth and the service of your religious society?" Such a query is important to a lay religious society which has survived without professional ministers for three hundred years. Time must be carefully allocated by men and women who are engaged in the routine jobs of office and home, but who nevertheless hold themselves responsive to calls from a great variety of religious and social undertakings.

In the thousand or so Quaker autobiographies which have come down to us from more leisurely days, when people took time to review their lives, there are many examples of successful business men who have

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changed or diminished their businesses in order to obtain time for religious duties. In the most famous of these, the Journal of John Woolman, the first great anti-slavery leader, we read: "Though my natural inclination was toward merchandising, yet I believed truth required me to live more free from cumber."

As a result, John Woolman gave up a successful business and secured the freedom necessary to him by becoming a tailor.

II

Quaker experience shows that the layman who is not "too busy" with other things can fit himself to give an opinion the value of which is comparable to that of the expert.

Of course there are fields in which the opinion of the expert must be sought. No one would trust himself to an amateur doctor if a professional were available. But in every democratic process we assume that certain primary decisions must be made by persons who are not specialists in the area concerned. If we believe in "one man -- one vote", we must necessarily expect all adults to make essential choices in matters about which they have very little information.

The price paid for this democratic procedure is a lessening of efficiency. A totalitarian government managed by experts is theoretically more efficient than a democratic government managed by amateurs. But there are certain human needs which are superior in value to efficiency. And one of these needs is freedom. In the factory system we have tended to sacrifice freedom to efficiency because there we are making mechanisms. In government we tend to sacrifice efficiency to freedom because there we are concerned with making men. But even a democratic government cannot afford to go far in sacrificing efficiency. We require both efficiency and freedom, even though efficiency and freedom limit each other. The answer to this dilemma is largely a matter of the proper allocation of time.

If the amateur is to hold himself free from the authority of the specialist he must devote enough time to prepare himself for, and to take an appropriate part in, the democratic process. If he does not do this the specialist will ultimately absorb the rights and privileges. Then democracy will cease to function.

But many will say "I do not have time for politics" -- or for some other form of democratic activity. Many say: "My business [or my home, or my career] absorbs all my time and energy."

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These words "I do not have time" can seldom be taken literally. They do not, as a rule, constitute a statement of fact but rather a judgment of value. They mean, not that "I cannot do this", but that "I would rather do something else". The business man who says "I do not have time for politics" could just as well say -- like John Woolman -- "I do not have time for business". The business man uses the first phrase because he places supreme value on success in business.

An impartial Providence has given us all exactly twenty-four hours in each day. What we do with these hours depends to a very large extent on what we value most. If our material success or our personal pleasure takes precedence over our sense of responsibility to the community, then we do not have time for public duty.

So the supreme test of our individual fitness for democracy is found in the individual use that we make of our time. If we do not make proper use of our time ourselves, dictators will arise to tell us how.

III

This phenomenon, of not having time for that on which our welfare essentially depends, deserves further analysis. It leads to a consideration of two tendencies characteristic of our present day culture. One is the cult of efficiency, the other is increasing secularism.

Reverence for efficiency leads to reliance on the specialist who has learned how to do one thing well. Today, with the great increase in the extent of human knowledge, no one has time to be an expert in more than one very limited field. It would be absurd to underrate the value of the expert. We depend on his knowledge in every phase of human activity. Yet the level attainable by a democracy is not the level of the experts. It is only the level of that knowledge which has been assimilated by the people as a whole.

The history of the evolution of life on this planet shows that a high degree of specialization is one sign of degeneration and approaching extinction. The highly specialized animal cannot adapt itself to changes in its environment. It becomes insensitive to every area of existence outside its own particular field of awareness and so becomes a victim to creatures that are more generalized and therefore more sensitive to a wider range of experience.

The human hand is not as good for fighting as a claw, nor for swimming as a fin, nor for flying as a wing. The hand is more generalized than claw, fin, or wing, and precisely for that reason we would not exchange it for any more specialized type of forelimb. The human brain is

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more highly generalized than any other part of the body, and for that reason is our most valuable physical organ. Specialization has its use, but a civilization is decadent unless its firm basis is a high degree of generalized knowledge. Totalitarianism depends on specialization; democracy depends on generalization.

Another anti-democratic force in our time is the tendency toward secularization. Democracy was brought to these shores by Puritans, Quakers, and others who came here primarily through religious motives. Democracy depends on religion because a healthy religion has power to soften the hard egocentric shell of every individual. It is that encrustation which blunts man's awareness of the needs of others.

IV

Enlightened self-interest regulated by law will carry us only just so far. It cannot provide a genuine social cement strong enough to hold the community together from within. Without the element of sacrificial altruism, leading persons into activities from which they can derive no private gain, democracy becomes unworkable.

Christianity, by teaching that personal gain is not of first importance, that man is his brother's keeper, is, when rightly interpreted, a powerful ally of democracy. Indeed the anthropologists have shown that religion is an important factor in integrating community life. It provides a soul for the body politic.

Christianity preserves both individuality and interdependence. It follows that the increasing secularization of American culture inevitably leads to a weakening of democracy. Our choice lies between a religion which furnishes the inner drive for co-operation and authoritarianism enforcing co-operation from without.

Because of our worship of efficiency, we think we have "no time" to develop the generalized ability on which democracy is dependent. Since our primary interests are secular, we have no time for religion, without which a democratic Society becomes a mechanical structure, doomed to wear out for lack of spiritual lubrication; doomed to wear down because a mechanism is not a living organism with a soul of its own. The essence of totalitarianism is mechanism, efficiency, and specialization. The essence of democracy is life itself with all its freedom to err.

Are we so busy that no part of life can be spared to maintain what in reality is life itself?

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VI, No. 37

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By Frank C. Hanighen September 14, 1949

FINANCIAL CONFERENCE: The American-British-Canadian conference has just ended with a composite reaction among observers in Washington. The published statement, they feel, suggests few concrete remedies to solve the British financial problem -- "chicken feed", as one British correspondent put it. At the same time, they note the comparatively complacent attitude of British officials and wonder if some side deal of great importance was reached, the nature of which will not be presently disclosed. In other words, those watching the scene have their fingers rather firmly crossed.

Out of the welter one strong impression emerges: that Secretary of the Treasury Snyder stood firm against "bold, imaginative" flapdoodle and held to his position that Britain must work for her own salvation. Does this mean devaluation of the pound? Well, Snyder stuck to his strategy of avoiding the topic at the ABC conference. But the voices of Camille Gutt of Belgium and Eugene Black were the voice of Snyder -- heard the next day in the meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. No one could mistake that Gutt and Black meant Britain must devalue.

Speculation on what a "side deal" could be centers on the conversations which Secretary Acheson and Foreign Minister Bevin have been holding on "political matters". It is not without significance that more and more talk in Washington turns to the subject of India, and with good reason. Britain owes, in the form of "sterling balances" some $14 billion to Middle East countries, the lion's share of which is owed to India. This constitutes a serious drain on British economy, and the end is as yet far from sight. At the same time it is becoming clear that the State Department believes that India should be the cornerstone of Far Eastern policy, succeeding China. With their minds fixed on these facts, observers are inclined to look for some "bold, imaginative" plan designed to establish U.S. "responsibilities" in India. The weasel word "responsibilities", tossed about by global-minded columnists, strengthens the suspicion that the next big international handout will have that country as the pretense.

To begin to digest this notion requires some effort on the part of reasonable men. We have ditched the countless millions of China, with the excuse that we should not pour money "down that bottomless drain". Why then should we blithely tackle the great problems of the sub-Continent whose enormous population rivals that of China? To stop Communism in Asia? The other day, one of MacArthur's chief strategists in the Pacific war told us that, at the expenditure of a "few millions" of dollars, air power based on Chiang Kai-shek's Formosa could neutralize the Chinese mainland and start innumerable revolts against the rule of the Chinese Communist Government. Indeed, the infinite imagination of Acheson and the State Department taxes the finite reasoning of anyone who tries to make sense out of what is called our foreign policy.

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RECIPROCAL TRADE AGREEMENTS: The Senate debate on the Reciprocal Trade Agreements was packed with fascinating arguments and information. But, unfortunately, the subject matter was so complex that the press and radio have not been able to do it jus-

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tice. Some points brought out on Friday, September 9 (see Congressional Record of that date), may be mentioned. In the first place, it is rather astonishing to note how many farm-state Senators now take a position critical of free trade -- that in itself is a sign of how times have changed. On Friday last, voices from such formerly anti-tariff states as Oklahoma, Nebraska, Colorado and Missouri found fault with the Reciprocal Trade Agreements and argued for the "peril point".

Senator Butler of Nebraska hammered away on one point, which is rarely given consideration in the press -- how the confused State Department policy has resulted in virtual subsidies for foreign agriculture. Butler said: "Mr. President, the increase in these imports (from Canada) demonstrates the absurdity in our conflicting policies on agriculture and foreign trade. On the one hand, we are attempting to hold farm prices up to reasonable levels with a system of price support loans and Government purchases. On the other hand, the State Department is trying to encourage additional imports and lower prices on these very same products. By coming in, they are making it impossible to maintain a fair level of farm prices. . . . Millions of bushels of Canadian feeds were shipped in here over the low tariff rates to be sold at or near American support prices. . . ." Mr. Millikin (Colorado). "Does not that have the precise effect of subsidizing the foreign goods coming into this country?" Mr. Butler. "Exactly so."

Senator Millikin fenced admirably with Senator George, upholding the Administration view. Millikin made one point which cannot be stressed too often. He pointed out that, although we have lowered our tariffs, foreign countries have not removed or reduced the various barriers to foreign trade such as the inconvertibility of currencies, bilateral trade pacts, etc. We believe the Coloradan scored off the Senator from Georgia when he emphasized: ". . . we have given a quid pro quo for something which we have not received. We have made these concessions in our imports on the theory that we would better our foreign trade. We have delivered. The other fellow has not delivered. . . . we have parted with a lot of our bargaining ability to get something which we have not gotten in return."

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MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Dr. Walter A. Maier, prominent Lutheran radio speaker, is defending himself in the press against charges by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt that he is a "somewhat fanatic fundamentalist"; and he obviously doesn't like Mrs. Roosevelt's linking him with "anti-Semites". Dr. Maier and fellow Lutherans are clearly all the more incensed because they defended Mrs. Roosevelt in her recent controversy with Cardinal Spellman. We haven't been able to follow the Maier-Roosevelt conflict in all its details, but we venture one comment -- that Dr. Maier and his friends should now learn a lesson. We start with the premise that Maier and his Lutheran friends are good, sound Americans. If Mrs. Roosevelt and her ilk start smearing such highly respected clergymen with the "anti-Semitic" label (a charge which we don't believe for a minute) they certainly must be basically the best sort of citizens. But by defending Mrs. Roosevelt in her controversy with the Cardinal, they must now realize that they made a mistake -- not by criticizing the Cardinal, but by associating themselves with the likes of Mrs. Roosevelt. If they do realize this, they have advanced farther than the Cardinal, who made the placating gesture of paying a visit to the lady after lambasting her in his letter.

If, on the other hand, Dr. Maier et al., have still failed to learn their lesson, let them consider her performance in the current number of McCall's magazine (September), which throws an interesting light on the lady's consistency. In an article in that journal, Mrs. Roosevelt related how she had received valuable education by association with the Communists in the American Youth Congress way back in 1940-41. "My work", she says, "with the American Youth Congress was of infinite value", for, she says, she learned how the Communists work. And she adds, "Of

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course, I never worked with them again, for I felt I could not trust them to be honest with me." Well, well ---- she "never worked with them again". In this column on August 3, we pointed out how Mrs. Roosevelt subsequently in 1945-47 worked with them, by serving as the Honorary Chairman of a Communist front (officially designated as such by the Department of Justice), the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief. In such capacity, she lent her prestige to the Communist attacks on American foreign policy, when the State Department battled with Belgrade because of the killing of American airmen. Had Mrs. Roosevelt forgotten the lessons (she said she learned in 1940-41) when she sponsored this subversive organization in 1945-47? Come now!

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DISMANTLING: Senator Wherry, Minority Leader, told us last week that he felt encouraged about the possibility of stopping dismantling. He said word had spread on the Hill that the British authorities in Germany are now resorting to outright destruction and scrapping of the big Thyssen steel plant, instead of merely dismantling the equipment as originally authorized. This news, according to the Senator, will make more likely the passage of a proposed clause in the ECA bill, stipulating a review of the whole dismantling situation. The Senator's words came on the heels of news that Bevin and Acheson would discuss dismantling during the Washington stay of the British Foreign Minister. Britain, it seems, wants the U.S. to assume more of the British financial commitments in Germany. If Acheson wishes to offset this proposed increase in the U.S. burden by stopping the dismantling, which costs the American taxpayer plenty, he will have a golden opportunity now. But we fear that Acheson is much less moved by concern for our budget than, say, Secretary Snyder. However, there are some signs of life on the Hill. In the corridors, there is afloat a suggestion that Senator George might well call upon Bevin and Acheson to stop dismantling in return for U.S. assumption of British commitments in Germany, as a practical means of lightening Britain's financial load. Senator George, it is believed, is enough of a statesman to launch such a proposal.

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BARZOV-PIROGOV CASE: It's an old saw that life often imitates Edgar Wallace. There certainly was an example of this in the recent strange case of Russian lieutenants Barzov and Pirogov. If one stands on the White House lawn, Pennsylvania Avenue side, one can look across Lafayette Square and see a building which houses a well-known French restaurant called Les Trois Mousquetaires. There, on August 16, took place a scene which surpassed the inventiveness of any top-flight thriller writer. In one booth sat the two Russian refugees. In another, on one side, sat a quartet of U.S. "hush-hush" agents, with others stationed outside the restaurant. In the booth on the other side of Barzov and Pirogov were four plug-uglies from the Soviet Embassy. Pirogov and Barzov argued passionately, but Barzov failed to persuade the former to go back to the Soviet Union. Finally, Pirogov stepped out of the booth, beside himself with anger, and by mistake stepped into the Soviet booth. The plug-uglies immediately sought to place handcuffs on him, and an all out fight ensued. The U.S. agents intervened, took both Pirogov and Barzov off with them. But the U.S. agents did not arrest the Russian strong-arm men. Why? That is the question which Washington observers who know the facts are asking. They are pondering a report that the State Department forbade the arrest of the Soviet agents. And why? That is a question which makes Mr. Acheson's department even more of an enigma.

Whatever the answer, the fact that Soviet agents tried to handcuff a man within sight of the White House suggests a curious anomaly. It is this: although the Russian network operates with such effrontery right on his threshold, the President seems unimpressed. During the past week, he told an official of the Veterans of Foreign Wars that the best way to deal with Communism in the United States is to "laugh it out of existence" instead of driving it underground by legal prosecution.

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Book Events

All Hope Abandon, by Irene Odoevzev; translated from the French by F. K. Reed. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., $3.00. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

Here we have a very remarkable novel about what happens to love, friendship, family relationships and the life of conscience in the Soviet Union. It belongs to that new and growing species of psychological fiction peculiar to our time, whose exponents include Ignazio Silone, Corrado Alvaro and Arthur Koestler, that has been engendered by the conflicts of human nature and an inhuman politics. Mme. Odoevzev's book, however, is distinguished from other examples by a subjective and impressionistic method and a kind of Dostoievskian mysticism. Of the author, who is now living in France, I know little; but she seems to have been a considerable figure among the Russian writers of the post-Revolutionary generation.

Her principal characters are Luganov, a celebrated poet, and Volkov, an Old Bolshevik. They were schoolmates and comrades in boyhood, and are bound together afterward by the memory of Luganov's gentle and gifted mother, who had loved and inspired them both, and who in the days of the Revolution was burned alive in her house by the peasants. Under the old regime, while Volkov was serving his time in Siberia, the precocious Luganov had already become famous as a writer. After the Revolution, because of his prestige in the outer world, his presence in the Soviet Union was an asset of great propaganda value to the new rulers, for this was a period in which a great pretense was made of the patronage of culture. Thus Luganov becomes one of a spoiled and petted coterie of authors and artists, who amid the universal squalor and misery live in luxury with the connivance of the State. It is in this period that Luganov falls in love with the young ballet-dancer, Vera Ogloblin, and marries her. Indifferent to politics, spiritually absorbed by his work and by his wife, almost unaware of the sinister realities of the Society he ornaments, and apparently even of the grandiose purges that have been in progress for some years, he does not understand that the days of his paradisical existence are running out. They end abruptly, however, when Luganov, a little tipsy with champagne at a dinner with some other literary celebrities, suddenly feels impelled to recite a humorous epigram about the dictator.

Thus Luganov finds himself abruptly transferred from his luxurious life to a solitary cell in prison. Vera is arrested, too, and with no great resistance is persuaded by the Chekist, Strohm, to incriminate her husband in some fantastic conspiracy. Eventually, she becomes Strohm's mistress, but it is only to denounce and destroy him. After a long period in prison, Luganov in a delirium throws himself out of a window, and is permanently crippled. In his convalescence he experiences a form of religious conversion. The intervention of Volkov, for the moment in favor with the Kremlin, saves Luganov from a sentence to a labor camp; instead he is exiled in Volkov's custody to the Ukraine. But after Hitler's attack on Russia even Volkov cannot save him. He begs Luganov to give himself up to the advancing Germans; when the poet indignantly refuses Volkov has him shot, evidently to spare him a lingering death in some salt mine or Arctic lumber camp. Volkov goes on to become a field marshal and to enter Berlin as a conqueror; but his sands too run out, and as we leave him he is returning to Moscow to meet his destiny in the cellars of the NKVD.

All the characters in Mme. Odoevzev's story suffer intensely from remorse of conscience, none more so than the cynical and disenchanted revolutionist, Volkov, who is evidently the author's mouthpiece. The Revolution, he tells Luganov, has made evil an end in itself; and this doubtless explains the Dantesque title. And Mme. Odoevzev's inferno is pervaded throughout by the satanic shadow of the Great Man, though he never appears in her narrative directly.

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